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S E C R E T BEIRUT 001322

LONDON FOR GOLDRICH, PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2015

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SUBJECT: MGLE01: SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE MAY HAVE WORKED WITH
HIZBALLAH ON UAV LAUNCHINGS

REF: BEIRUT 1194

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

¶1. (S) Introduction and summary. Tyre businessman Qassim Daoud (strictly protect) provided econoff on April 19 with further details on Hizballah's "Mirsad-1" Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flight into Israeli airspace on April 11 (reftel). Daoud has well-placed contacts in the southern Shia community, sustained in part on the basis of his late brother's service as a senior Amal military commander in the 1980's. Daoud spoke recently with Amal security officers and Lebanese Army officers. His sources said that Syrian intelligence was involved in the decision to launch the Mirsad-1 over Israel, though Hizballah also had its own reasons for the overflight. Hizballah has received a total of three Mirsad-1 UAVs from Iran, but only one is operational. Shia residents near the Blue Line strongly support Hizballah's militia, according to another source, Shia journalist Kassem Kassir. End introduction and summary.

Sources: Mirsad-1 launched with Syrian approval; one of three

¶2. (S) Sources in Amal and the Lebanese Army reported to Qassim Daoud that the joint Syrian intelligence/Hizballah security committee for coordinating operations was still active. Syrian intelligence officers prompted the launching of the Mirsad-1 on April 11 in order to coincide with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's meeting with the U.S. President. Hizballah had its own interests as well: to demonstrate for the Lebanese people the effectiveness of its militia amid discussion of disarmament; and to maintain the "balance of terror" with Israel.

¶3. (C) These sources also reported that Hizballah had received three Mirsad-1 UAVs from Iran. Only the UAV that overflowed Israel on April 11 and safely returned to base is operational. The first Mirsad-1 that flew over Israel on November 7 crash landed along the southern Lebanese coast and is no longer functional. The remaining Mirsad-1 arrived from Iran with a mechanical defect. The defect can be repaired, our sources said, but the needed repair is beyond Hizballah's technical capability.

¶4. (C) The Mirsad-1 flight on April 11 was seen and heard clearly by the residents of Khiam and Kfar Killa in southern Lebanon. The Mirsad-1 flew low and its noisy engine was described as very loud. Residents saw the Mirsad-1 flying about 800m north of the Blue Line, but were not able to observe it entering Israeli airspace.

Locals support Hizballah air incursion

¶5. (C) Hizballah's military wing and its aerial operations are especially popular in Shia villages near the Blue Line, according to Kassem Kassir, a Shia journalist and former Hizballah member. Despite the danger of Israeli retaliation, residents near the Blue Line perceive that Israel has stepped

up its violations of Lebanese airspace recently (the UN cannot confirm this generalization). Many Lebanese in the area also believe that Israel is threatening the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Any Israeli retaliation would increase Hizballah's legitimacy. The Shia who live in the former Israeli-occupied "security zone" are very protective of Hizballah's arms, according to Kassir.

Comment

¶6. (C) Daoud moves freely in both Amal and Hizballah circles in southern Lebanon. People still come up to him and kiss him out of admiration for his late brother. His brother, Daoud Daoud, fought against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon but also tried to forge a path independent of Syria. Daoud believes that Amal leader Nabih Berri, with Syrian complicity, ordered his brother's assassination. Daoud Daoud was gunned down in his car near a Syrian roadblock in 1988. End comment.

FELTMAN